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CITY LIFE

A MASK OF SONNETS

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A MASK OF SONNETS

ONE LAST WORD
TO MY HARVARD COLLEGE CLASSMATES
LIVING AT COMMENCEMENT

1864 — 1914



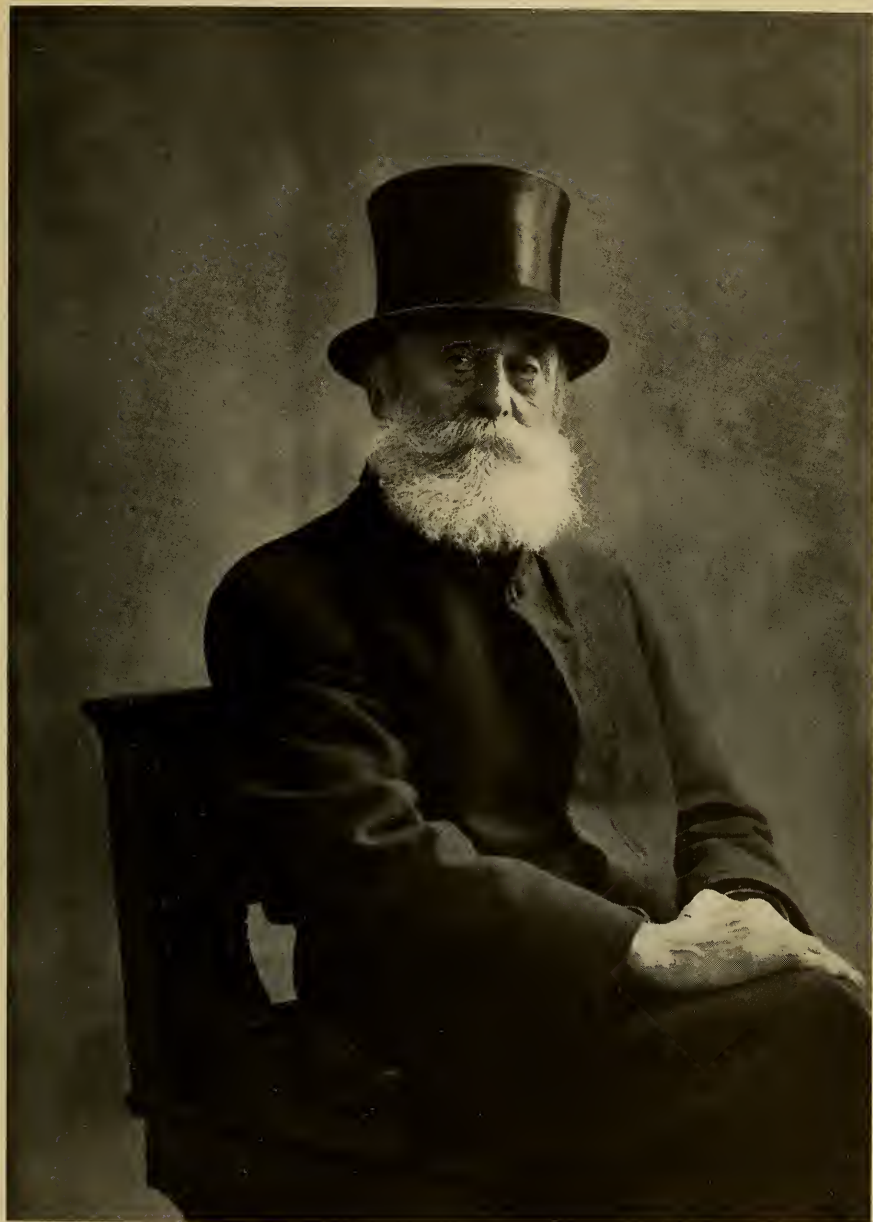
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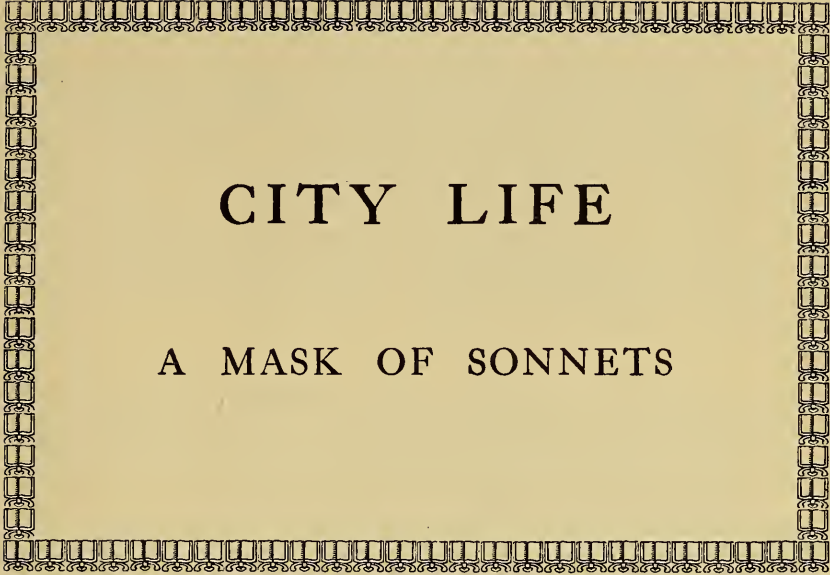
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Henry W. Fiske



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A MASK OF SONNETS

TO MY READING LAMP

CONSPICUOUS type of geometric form
Whose sides are trapezoids in number five
And bulk a frustum would be, while alive
Still close beside it tries this struggling worm
To read the daily news of calm or storm
And monthly magazines, the human hive
From all about inviting him to dive
Where perjuries are helps and hates survive?!—

Through thee competing is there not a path
To lead this quivering flybait to the sun,
To his lost product yet an aftermath
Before his ultra seventy day is done,
Beside his dreary, blank, unheated hearth
No glory, story, PERSiflage, nor fun?

TO MY LANDLADY

WHOSE name is Myriad and whose fame is mud,
Before the devil took thee twice to wive
And left superior sweethearts' halves alive
And non-protestants blasted in the bud
How gott'st thy shelter and tridaily food,
And by what treacheries didst then contrive
And with thy calculating friends connive
To place a monthly balance to the good?

Whose weekly kindness would withdraw a cold
Potato from a frowsy beggar's store,
And hast a countenance ten times as bold,
Compelled like Oliver to ask for more;
Thy thefts re-stored in trunks, thy gas, thy heat,
Distort our features, warming not our feet.

TO INVENTION

PURPOSE of Genius, from composite air
Or water gliding towards a deeper goal,
Or fired worthless sediment, prepare
To save my semblance from its last despair,
Its nose of early Grecian and red hair;
To do the world a favor and submit
Thyself to competition for the dime,
Crown earthly hope for good, prove we are IT,
Fill the serene unconscious, stand sublime,—
Plus Ultra, naming the frontier of Time!

O ne'er o'erladen mother, wilt thou be,
And canst, significance to my nots and me,
By safe investment rich and bargain fair?
Disclose thy Monday Plaisance, When and Where!

TO AN OLD WOMAN

I LOVED thee, sweetheart, when the joy of life
Illumined both our smiles in mothers' arms,
When aunts-in-law had answered, George's Wife,
And granddads recognized thy opening charms;
I loved thee for thy quick responses then
Before and moreish than all other men.
Thy prize papa was rich as ours was poor,
And small resemblance 'twixt his house and your.

If which too previous for a sonnet is
Expunge the syllables that scan amiss;
My heavenly theme requireth perfect art,
The sense connecting where the versets part:
Each eight matched lines this sexplet serial viz
Whose fives that fit must rhyme with self and heart.

TO THE SAME

I loved thee, sweetheart, when a virgin's truth
With one false kiss thou scatteredst to the world,
A worldly choice for which a cent is twirled
Without a thought or one last word of ruth;
An unknown, seen or heard, and older youth,
Thy rightful blush bediamonded and pearled
With all its banners to the day unfurled
And thirty thousand silver coins, forsooth.

In seven short years preferred my rival's line
His thirty thousand showed the minus sign
And his small stature standing towards the sky
Had turned the angle right to underlie
And left an heir to share my flattering sigh,
Uncertain if her heart thrice won was mine.

TO THE SAME

I loved thee, sweetheart, when advancing age
And long delay had dulled my manhood's prime,
Unwilling thus—to give thee back to Time,
To sealed forever the path-blotted page
With tears indeed, how quick enough with rage
And all my own or half another's blood
Had I been licensed to draw the sword
Or turn the rifle on my cross engage.

In this perpetual, anteborn defeat
Which must have fallen from the Heights Above,
Wherewith all contradiction seems to meet,
Above all others Whether God is Love,
If I can have of all success but one
Unmask the Sonnet; give me yet a SON!

If I wander never mind me;
Where you left me shall you find me
Peeping still before, behind me
At my dreary chamber door,
Lost in love, in life defeated,
But content if not conceited
With a whispered, oft repeated
Something I have said before:

With a softly whispered something,
Something, something, something, something,
Something, something, something, something,
Something I have said before,
Nothing much. Excuse the sonnet,
Nothing much—and nothing more.



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